Teacher Time
for Preschool Teachers

Judi Stevenson-Garcia: Hello. Welcome to Teacher Time. We are so glad you've joined us today. I'm Judi Garcia, and I will be one of your hosts for this series. I'm here with my cohost, Will Scott. We are both part of the National Center on Early Childhood Development Teaching and Learning, and we're both so excited to be with your today to talk about curriculum implementation in settings that serve three- and four-year-olds. Hi, Will. It's nice to be back together with you today.

William Scott: Hi, Judi. I'm happy to be here today as your cohost for this series.

Judi: This series is intended to provide you with information about the ways in which you can support preschool children's growth and development through the implementation of high-quality and developmentally appropriate curriculum practices, specifically how your learning environment, materials, activities and interactions with children all work together to support children's growth and development. And we know how important it is to recognize children's individual interests, languages, cultures and learning styles and provide responsive, organized learning environments that promote children's growth and development. This series has four segments. Our first episode focused on implementing curriculum that is responsive to children's interests. Today we'll talk about strategies you can use to identify specific needs of individual children and provide a learning environment that is specifically designed to support their learning and development.

Will: As you know, each episode is followed up by a Coffee Break where we will ask the experts from today's episode your questions that you send in during today's show. Please remember to enter any questions you have into the chat box at the bottom of your screen. Also, there will be several opportunities for you to engage with us through some chats and polls during today's episode, so make sure to keep an eye out for those.

Judi: Also, we don't want this to be the end of the conversation, so please take time to go to our special Teacher Time community in My Peers. You'll be able to see the Coffee Breaks there as soon as they are released, and ask questions, participate in polls and engage in conversations with other teachers just like yourself. Finally, make sure you fill out the evaluation at the end of the show. After you complete it, you'll be prompted to print your certificate of attendance. Plus, we'd really like your feedback so we can make this the most useful experience we possibly can. We hope you'll use the ideas we share today and share your ideas both in the comment box and on the My Peers group.

Will: Last time we were together, we talked about implementing curriculum in a way that is responsive to the specific children you're working with. We know how important it is to support children's learning with a responsive approach to curriculum. Today's topic is creating responsive environments for preschoolers, and the focus is on using materials and learning opportunities to meet the individual needs of all children. Your curriculum likely has guidance for how to set up your learning environment. It's important to follow those guidelines as you implement curriculum, but you also need to regularly adjust the environment and learning opportunities to be responsive to the interests and needs of your children.

Judi: Developmentally appropriate practice emphasizes the importance of young children's learning environments. We know environments should be responsive and foster trust and emotional security. And one of the ways this happens is when children see their interests reflected and when they can access materials that are at the right stage to support their growth and development in different skills. So, what might that look like? Let's take a few minutes to think about materials in your learning environment. For example, are children able to access and play with materials? And do they reflect children's interests and abilities?

Will: Right now we would really like to hear from you about how often you change materials in your environment based on children's interests and abilities. You should see a poll on your screen. Take a minute to answer, and we'll come back to talk about the results.

Judi: That's great. Now it's time to welcome our guest expert today, Dr. Alex Figueras-Daniel. Dr. Figueras-Daniel is senior research coordinator at the National Institute for Early Education Research, which many of us know as NIEER. She has collaborated on NIEER's field research projects over the past five years and served as the spokesperson for NIEER's outreach to the Hispanic media. Alex has been a pre-kindergarten teacher and a teacher in a dual language program, and has supported many programs and teachers in understanding and implementing high-quality curriculum practices.

Will: Today Alex is here to help us understand the ways we can create learning environments designed to reflect the knowledge and interests of children and families. Welcome, Dr. Alex. So, why is the learning environment so important?

Alexandra Figueras-Daniel: The learning environment is very important. First, it helps to communicate to children that this space is theirs, and that they're supposed to really find this to be their home away from home. It also teaches them that this is a space where they can be autonomous. And so depending on how the environment is set up for them, they have opportunities to access things freely based on what they're interested in and what they want to work on for the day. And, finally, it is a huge communicator of the values that we feel children should know in that their cultures and languages should be represented there so that they feel that they can build on their identity as well while they're away from their homes.

Judi: And a lot of your research really focuses on the environment, right? Is that because it's so important?

Alex: Yes. I think that in our field, the one thing that we place a super strong emphasis on when we're looking at quality is the environment and how the environment is specifically set up to support children's learning on a very individual basis.

Judi: One of the things that we hear sometimes when we talk about the learning environment is that it's is that it's a third teacher, so when we think about the teachers that children might engage with first, obviously we know parents are their first teacher, but then they have teachers in their programs that they engage with. But then there is this idea that maybe the environment can act as a teacher depending on how the teacher sets up the environment to support learning and development. So, could you help us think about how a teacher could use the learning environment as a partner, as a third teacher to support children's learning and development?

Alex: Yes. On a very basic level the idea of small furniture and chairs and tables that make it comfortable for children to learn, schedules and routines that support predictability so it's really easy to focus on learning and things that you want to do when you don't have to be concerned about when lunch might be happening or when mom or dad is coming back for you, and that the environment should be really warm and really allow children to feel comfortable enough to be there and live there and take risks and engage with other children. At another level, the environment does need to be accessible for different needs for different disabilities, cultures, languages and ages, because often in our programs children within their age have varying levels of ability, but we also have lots of mixed-age programs, and so that needs to be thought of as well. The outdoor environment is something else that needs to really be considered in terms of play equipment and how many different skills children have access to developing on the playground. And, finally, as mentioned before, the need for real opportunities to see their cultures and languages reflected.

Judi: That's great. We're going to watch some video of a learning environment that is acting as the third teacher for children. And then we'll come back and we'll chat about it for a little bit.

Alex: Sure.

Judi: Okay. So, we'll watch that.

[Begin Video Clip]

Teacher: Who's going to go on the bus? Do you remember who goes on the bus?

Student: Me.

Teacher: Riley goes on the bus. Who else goes on a bus?

Student: Me. Go home.

Teacher: Jaden. Jaden goes on the bus. And then we'll go home. We do.

Student: And [inaudible] go on the bus?

Teacher: Toren? I don't know. Ask him.

Student: I don't go on the bus.

Student: Okay.

Student: Me either.

Student: Go outside and play.

Student: I don't think so. I don't think so. This is the oven.

[End Video Clip]

Will: Dr. Alex, what did you think about what we saw here in these learning environments?

Alex: I think I saw lots of things that I usually see fortunately. For one in the opening scene where the children are playing in the dramatic play center, you can see that there are bins with labels. That makes it very easy for them to put things away. But essentially that they also have all the play materials that they need to carry out what looks like a really sophisticated family play scenario. So, they have the dolls, the highchairs and everything is right within access, and they're building all of the social emotional skills that you would hope to see happening in a dramatic play center. There is no searching around for something that they might need to contribute to the play, and it's really just all the work that they're doing. During the lunchtime I saw that the children were helping themselves to their lunch while they were talking with the teacher. So, again, they can really focus on those interactions rather than waiting or worrying about when they were going to get their part. And, finally, I think one of the things that really stood out to me, although I don't know if it's super obvious, but being a regular classroom observer I noticed the interactive schedule that was posted behind the children playing with the blocks, and I can see that the teacher must be moving some type of a marker along the way so that children are able to see exactly what part of the day they're on and what part might be coming up next. I think that's a really meaningful way to use a display in the classroom to help to build autonomy and help them really be—I don't want to say mindful, but very engaged in what they're actually doing rather than worrying about other things.

Judi: That's great. So, the environment is not just the materials, but also the things on display on the walls and the way that the teacher engages with children provides then with autonomy. That's great. Thank you so much. These are great examples. I know we'll get to talk with you more on the Coffee Break about what we've seen here.

Alex: Okay.

Judi: Remember, if you have questions for Alex, submit them in the comments box and we'll discuss them during the next Coffee Break.

Will: Now let's look at the responses we received from the poll about how often you change materials in your learning environments.

Judi: We have our poll results in. It looks like the majority of people who are viewing today say that they frequently, at least monthly, change the materials in their classrooms and their learning environments to reflect the needs of individual children, which is fantastic.

Will: That is. That's great.

Judi: Yes. So, now we're going to ask you to respond in our chat box. One of the things we'd like to hear is how you have used your learning environment as a third teacher. For example, to scaffold learning, reflect children's interests and abilities, or to adapt for children with disabilities.

Will: Take a minute to let us know, and we'll come back to your responses in a bit.

Judi: Now we are going to take a few minutes to focus specifically on the development of language and literacy. Earlier this week I had the chance to speak with Dr. Linda Espinosa, Professor Emeritus of Early Childhood Education at the University of Missouri, Columbia. Let's watch to see what she has to say about creating learning environments that support children's growth and development in language and literacy. So, we're happy to have Dr. Linda Espinosa back with us in the studio today. Dr. Espinosa is a Professor Emeritus of Early Childhood Education at the University of Missouri, Columbia. She has worked extensively with low-income Hispanic and Latino children and families throughout the State of California as a school administrator and program director. She has published more than 120 research articles, book chapters and training manuals on how to establish effective educational services for low-income minority families and children who are acquiring English as a second language. Thanks so much for being here today, Linda.

Linda Espinosa: My pleasure.

Judi: We're excited to have you back. We've been talking today a little bit about how teachers can be responsive to children and meet their individual needs in the classroom. One of the things we want to think about specifically with you is supporting individual children's language and literacy experiences and their growth and development. We know that this is important because they each have unique experiences and backgrounds. Their cultures and languages are unique, and what they've experienced is different when they come into the classroom. So, we want to think about ways to make sure that the activities that we provide, the instructional opportunities that we provide are appropriate to each child and meet their specific knowledge and skills. So, if you could help us think a little bit about ways that teachers can provide interesting and engaging learning experiences for children that will really meet them where they're at.

Linda: Right. And I'm so glad you brought up the unique individualized nature of language develop, because it is really important that as teachers, as educators we do understand an awful lot about the background of the children, particularly when those backgrounds are not similar to our own so that after we've had those family interviews and we've talked to families about those early learning experiences and the family's cultural practices, the family's language preferences, then we can be responsive to what the child is saying to us. The language aspect of it does underlie everything else that we're doing in the classroom, so to systematically understand and build upon the language abilities that the child brings into our settings, what we'll do is really sort of focus in on that individual interaction with the child and be attentive to, responsive to and extend the kinds of language things we're hearing from the child. So, we will necessarily listen to what it is the child is telling us and showing a sincere interest in what the child is saying, and then respond to it in kind of an elaborated way so that we take that interest, we understand where it comes from and then we start to build upon it. So, we might add adjectives, maybe complex adverbs, maybe a complex sentence, change the tense of the sentence and maybe add something at the end that's either a comment or a question. So, you kind of keep that interaction going back and forth between you and the child. Again, it really doesn't require that as adults we slow down. Pay attention to what that child is saying. And I know this is really difficult in that chaotic world of preschool teaching, but occasionally we need to make time for it for each child so that we hear what they're saying and we attach our response to what is it that's important in those curriculum goals. So, we might bring in a

vocabulary word if we're talking about shapes or colors or sizes or whatever the particular focus of that curriculum is that day. And so we respond to that and then we build in these interesting, but a little bit more complex, a little bit more sophisticated language and get that conversation going not so different than what you would do with an adult.

Judi: We're going to take a few minutes to just watch a teacher as she's interacting with a few children and listening to them and then supporting them in their language.

[Begin Video Clip]

Teacher: Oh, no. Please don't crush our tower, Aaron. Please don't crush our tower. Oh, I know. Aaron, look at—come here, Aaron. Come here. Look at Allison's face. Look at—come here. Come sit with Michelle. Look at Allison's face. How do you think she feels right now? Why do you think she's sad? Because—

Student: I don't know.

Teacher: You did. You did knock down her tower and that made her sad. How do you think you can make Allison feel better?

Student: How I—

Teacher: As her. How can I make you feel better?

Student: How I make you better?

Teacher: Allison, [speaking in Spanish]?

Student: Hey, when it gets all the way to the top—

Student: I want to make you better.

Teacher: What if we helped her rebuild it? [Speaking in Spanish] Let's help her rebuild it.

[End Video Clip]

Judi: So, I'd just love to hear your thoughts about what this teacher did to support these children individually where they were in terms of their language and ability to express their needs and their thoughts.

Linda: Right. It was a beautiful example of a teacher who was sensitive and responsive. This little guy, Aaron, had done something that a teacher could have said, "No, don't do that. You knocked her blocks. Don't you see that makes her feel bad?" But she didn't. She brought him over to communicate, "We want to talk about what you did." We want to provide not just language modeling, but also some content around social emotional development. So, she was able to combine those in a very seamless and natural way. She brings Aaron over. He sits on her lap. She helps him understand how Allison is feeling, because she had built something and he had knocked it over probably recklessly and thoughtlessly. The teacher is helping to build in

him that concept of empathy and compassion towards Allison's feelings. The really interesting part too is that Aaron is very cooperative and clearly wants to improve on his interactions and probably wants to be friends with Allison, which most preschoolers do really have this desire to have high-quality social interactions with their peers. We also could see that Allison wasn't responding to English, and so the teacher had the bilingual ability to communicate to little Allison, "Is it okay if we help you? Do you want us to help you?" Allison didn't look up, but then the teacher stopped and she looked up, which gives us a clue that she understood. She has receptive language abilities probably way beyond what she's able to express. So, the teacher asked her if it's okay, and then she kind of nodded and said, "Yes," so gave that indication and then talked to Aaron again. I think this was a very sensitive way of both modeling the English language for Aaron and for Allison, and helping Allison understand what that content of that lesson was in the language that Allison is clearly more proficient in. But I would just also say that we really don't know from this clip how much Allison knows either in Spanish or English, and that would be a good thing to understand that better.

Judi: I think one thing that we can see is that the teacher knows where the children's language abilities are so that she's able to support them, so that she knows that within this circumstance where she's helping them negotiate this problem that they have, that speaking to Allison in Spanish to tell her what's happening or offering her the solution in Spanish is something that Allison might need, and that offering the solution to support what Aaron needed. "Let's offer a solution to her," and helped him with that language too. So, it's clear that she knows where they are in her own classroom understanding what their language abilities are, and then she's building on that in a way that's really supportive, and, like you said, also supporting them in their social emotional development.

Linda: Right. So, she's modeling and she has expectations clearly. She's extending out a little bit. It was very clear where Aaron was concerned how she was helping to extend his understand and his use of English. A little less clear where Allison was in that aspect of dual language development—where she was in her English and where she was in Spanish. But my sense would be if she thought Allison was more capable, had more English proficiency, and I understand this was the beginning of the year and maybe this was a brand new language for Allison, so she wasn't putting unusual demands on Allison to respond in a language that she may not have had any abilities in whatsoever.

Judi: That's great. Can you help us think a little bit about in classrooms where we're supporting very young children in their language development some strategies for supporting individual children? What are some key things that teachers can do that will really help them be able to individualize in the way that we saw in this video?

Linda: We kind of brought this up already, but understanding the background of the child and what those interests are, what those family practices are, what this child has been exposed to in their earlier years is really key to them connecting the content of what we're teaching. Obviously our content is going to promote the goals that we have within our curriculum so you know what the themes are, what the concepts are that you are working on. For the example earlier the teacher may have been really working on identifying human emotion: sad, happy, etcetera. Maybe that was part of a theme. So, you have your content, and then you kind of understand how you can connect that into the interactions that language and literacy interactions you have with the children through the choice of books, through the types of

materials that you put in your learning centers, through the interactions that you carefully structure in those learning centers and our ability to both teach content, individualize it and make it culturally consistent with what the child has already experienced. An excellent way to instruct that incorporates all of these elements would be using a dialogic reading approach. Dialogic reading is basically just a term that we use when you select a book. Let's say *The Hungry Caterpillar*. It's available in Spanish and in English, and for this teacher's classroom that would be very appropriate. You select a book, and then maybe you read the title and you interact with the children about what do they think it's about. Who do you think is going to be in this story? What might happen in this story? It's a way of engaging children with the content and emphasizing the vocabulary that you know is important as part of your curriculum goal and using that storybook time in a way that will actually increase the child's participation and learning of those important lessons.

Judi: So, reading a book is more like a conversation—a back and forth than just holding the book and reading from page to page?

Linda: Exactly. So, you have that back and forth, and that's what's going to keep them engaged and help them focus on, "This is what happened. What's going to happen next? What do you think could be another way that this could happen?" So, you keep their attention focused and keep them anticipating and get that language going.

Judi: That's great. I would imagine that that would support dual language learners as well in their ability to engage in a book reading.

Linda: With dual language learners we actually want to encourage teachers to identify a book that's available in the child's native language, like we mentioned that *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* is available in Spanish and in English. And it's important that the child hears that book in their native language before you introduce it in English. We can do that in a variety of ways. Remember, we've already talked with the family, so we've had our family interviews and hopefully we've also identified some family members who are able to come in and maybe read that book to a small group. It doesn't just have to be Spanish speakers. You could read it to English speakers as well, and that would be introducing a second language to native English speakers. The point for dual language learners is that they hear the content and they know the key vocabulary in Spanish in their home language, and then we help them. So, when the teacher reads it in English, we can make that application of, "This is the word in your home language," and then the application, and, "This is what it looks like in English," which helps them then to transfer the language skills they already have into that task of learning English. One of the principles for dual language learners is, yes, they need to acquire English. Yes, it's extremely important for kindergarten entry, but, no, it should not come at the expense of their own language. So, we have to find these strategies and those ways of supporting both.

Judi: This is really helpful. Thank you, Linda, for being here today, and we'll see you again on our next episode.

Linda: Thank you.

Judi: So, for more information on any of the things that Linda has just shared, make sure you refer to the viewer's guide for this episode for links to more resources on this topic on the

ECLKC. Linda will be back with us for the next preschool episode to talk more about supporting children's language and literacy development. For more information on supporting language and literacy in your learning environment, you can go to the ECLKC and search for the Planned Language Approach, a comprehensive, systematic, research-based approach that ensures optimal language and literacy services for children who speak English and for those who are dual language learners.

Will: Now let's take a look at our chat responses.

Judi: Sure. So, we have lots of responses. And, remember, we asked teachers to tell us about how they use the environment as a third teacher. If you remember, we said you have parents, teachers and then obviously the teaching staff in the classroom. But we can think about the learning environment as a way to support children's learning and development, so it kind of acts as a teacher in terms of supporting their growth and development. Some of our teachers responded. Meagan responded that she places materials in specific spots in her classroom to promote conversations and questions and teamwork, which is really great. Another teacher says she sets up a cozy corner where children can relax. A few other teachers, Nancy specifically said she uses the environment by adding items to enhance what children are learning about. So, this is great. We've heard from so many teachers today about how they're using the environment as a third teacher.

Will: It is exciting to hear live from teachers who are using the environment to promote development.

Judi: I love it. It's great. So, now we're going to turn to welcome Dr. Alex back with us. Thanks for joining us again.

Alex: Thank you.

Judi: So, we're going to watch two videos of two different teachers who are talking about how they use the environment to support children's growth and development. Can you just help us think about what we should look for while we watch?

Alex: Sure. I think we should pay attention to how the teacher takes cues from the children to make adjustments to be supportive of all the children in the classroom. Also there is video to help us see when a teacher makes a very specific change to support a skill that sees needs help.

Judi: That's great. Let's take a look.

[Begin Video Clip]

Teacher: With eight children, especially with our mixed age groups, it is sometimes a challenge to find out what the children are interested in. The teachers do a lot of watching the children to see what they're interested in, which toys they're tending to go to, especially after several days when we add new toys in if they're going to those toys, that we know those are what they're most interested in, and so we're able to add other toys to build on that. So, if they're really interested in the blocks, then we can bring in the animals to play with the blocks. We do a lot of watching and a lot of note taking for the children on what they're playing with and how they're

playing so that we can kind of build the skills that they need. If they're interested in the sand, adding different styles of toys. Using different words really does help keep them interested, but it also helps them to continue to grow and understand what they're doing and how they can use those skills—not just with the sand or with the blocks, but in other areas of play.

Teacher: I think the activity really helped me see which level the kids are regarding their fine motor skills. Right now, for example, with the child that has difficulty cutting, I would do more of fun activities, like Play-Doh. Not too much instructional activities with them, so maybe their muscles can have some more practice. I'm thinking about other activities, such as ripping paper or tearing paper apart. That could be helpful. So, I'm already thinking what this child is going to need to get to the point where it could be easier for them to handle the scissors. I have to think about that child and think about the fun activities for that one, but then also I have to think about the other child that is already having no difficulty with straight lines and maybe promote them with cutting circles or lines. It can be a little bit more challenging, but not too hard so that it can be fun. It can be something that they can feel accomplished of what they are doing.

[End Video Clip]

Will: Dr. Alex, did you think?

Alex: Well, I love these teachers. They are just so skillful at watching the children in their class. I think specifically the first teacher really talked about how she's watching children and taking cues from their interests and changing actual materials in the block center, in the sand area. I think that's really important, because those are the ways that we maintain engagement and keep children excited about learning the next part. The second teacher really talked a lot about this trajectory of skill development on fine motor skills with the child, about cutting. I think that's really important. It really shows how deeply she understands child development and the progression for fine motor skills, and how she's responding to the child to help develop the skill and how she's able to recognize what the scaffolds are that the child's needs are.

Judi: I think it was really great, especially with what the first teacher was telling us, that she just pays attention. She watches them. She thinks about what's interesting to them, and maybe how she can amplify what they're interested in so she can build on their skills that they're already showing, but also keep them engaged. If you go to the same center every day and the same materials are there every day, you might not want to go there anymore. I love that she said she brought things into the block area. So, it's not just blocks. "You love building with blocks. Here are some more things to extend what you're already doing there." The fine motor skill example to me is so valuable. We recognize that children are working on these skills, and then giving them materials that will help them be successful. I love that she said that. We want challenge them, but we also want them to feel successful. I think that that's so important.

Alex: Definitely.

Judi: Thank you, Alex, for being here. It's great to have you here.

Alex: Thank you.

Judi: Alex will be joining us for our remaining episodes to share more of her insights into how to implement a high-quality and rich curriculum in your learning environment. Okay. So, now it's time for you to try it out. As Dr. Alex just mentioned, in order to create a learning environment that supports individual children, it is important to, one, understand developmental progressions, which you can find in the Early Learning Outcomes Framework; two, know where your children are in that development, which requires observation and ongoing child assessment; and, three, provide materials and learning opportunities to meet children where they are and to build new skills.

Will: Your homework is to think about several of the children in your group who have a varied range of content knowledge and abilities in one or more learning domains or subdomains. Use what you know about these children with whatever tools you currently have, such as your ongoing assessment system, and determine what they might be ready to learn next.

Judi: After you've thought about what knowledge, skills and abilities your children have, take a look at your learning environment and determine whether the materials and learning opportunities you are providing support those individual children in developing new skills. And then let us know what happens. We'll be checking in with you on My Peers to see how this is going. Now we're going to take a moment and connect this thinking about implementing a responsive curriculum to the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes framework. Peter Pizzolongo is here to tell us about that.

Peter Pizzolongo: I'm Peter Pizzolongo, Director of Training & Technical Assistance Services at the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning. For this portion of Teacher Time we'll focus on ELOF: the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five.

The ELOF is a framework that represents the continuum of learning for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers what children should know and be able to do during their formative years from birth through age five. ELOF outlines and describes the skills, behaviors, and concepts that Early Head Start and Head Start programs must foster in all children, including children who are dual language learners and children with disabilities. ELOF is organized in a way that can help teachers and families understand child development and guide the ways in which we help children learn. You can learn more about ELOF by going to the ELOF pages on the ECLKC Website, the Office of Head Start's Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. For today's topic, Creating a Responsive Environment for Young Children, this ELOF segment focus is on the domain Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development. This domain includes goals for Perception, Fine and Gross Motor Development and Health, Safety, and Nutrition. Perception refers to children's use of their senses to gather and understand information and respond to the world around them. Preschoolers rely on perceptual information to develop a greater awareness of their bodies in space and to move effectively to perform tasks. Think about how preschoolers use their senses as they engage in activities that use their fine or gross motor skills, such as when a child moves his body in relation to an object to perform a task, a skill needed to, for example, get in position to kick a ball. Motor skills support children in fully exploring their environment and interacting with people. So, these skills support development in all domains. Children's physical wellbeing depends on a number of factors, including their knowledge and use of safe, healthy behaviors and routines. As we think about today's Teacher Time topic, let's consider how you use your environment to support the natural learning that preschoolers engage in every day. We'll see a video of children engaged in a water play activity and then talk

about a goal and examples of the developmental progression that these children are exhibiting. Be sure to focus on how children are using perception and fine motor skills as they explore the wonders of water and sponges.

[Begin video clip]

[End video clip]

Peter: These boys were having a good time with water play. One of the ELOF goals is child demonstrates increasing control, strength, and coordination of small muscles. Did you notice how the child on the right with the orange sponge squeezes the sponge with a loose grip and watches the water drip, and later lifts the sponge higher, squeezes using his whole hand, and watches the water drip differently? The child next to him, with the green sponge, repeats the action. Later, the child with the green sponge scoops more water with a cup and pours it on the sponge. The developmental progression for preschool children that lead to meeting this goal begin with children performing simple hand-eye tasks with limited precision and control moving to children coordinating their hand and eye movements to carry out tasks, such as the use of the pincer grip for light sponge squeezing and full-fist grasp to get the liquid out of the sponge faster. Before children can demonstrate these skills, it's important to understand the developmental progression for infants and toddlers, which includes coordinating hands and eyes to reach for objects, to using hand-eye coordination for more complex actions, such as stacking cups. By 36 months, most children can coordinate their fine motor movement to be able to complete puzzles, turn the pages of a book, and thread beads with large holes. And, as in other domains, the sequence of skills that children demonstrate as they refine their movements is a product of physical maturation, teaching and learning, and the opportunity to practice newly discovered skills. Your curriculum includes experiences that promote children learning new concepts and skills in this domain. How you set up your environment indoors and outdoors, and including routines is key to promoting children's learning and skill development. And, by knowing the developmental progression and the strengths, interests, and needs of each child in the group, teachers know how best to support children learning new concepts and practicing new skills. You most likely have a variety of equipment, materials, and activities for children to enhance their perceptual, motor, and physical development. You have opportunities for children to balance on one leg and dance to music. You also have equipment and materials, such as a balance beam, hoops, jump ropes, tricycles or other riding equipment, large and small balls, foam bats, pegboards, stringing beads, paints and brushes, clay, and dramatic play clothing with zippers, buttons, and ties. You plan experiences that promote children's use of their senses and fine and gross motor skills: setting the table, pouring milk, maneuvering an obstacle course, exploring objects in a water play table. For some children some of the activities might require adaptation: assisted technologies, such as modified keyboards, having a wheelchair-accessible outdoor play area, or using written symbols to help a child with a hearing disability participate in a movement activity. Planning your environment is grounded in understanding where each child is, what her strengths, interests, and needs are, which begins with understanding how children grow and develop. The ELOF is a tool for teachers to use to help with that understanding. I hope that this segment has helped you to better understand the Early Learning Outcomes Framework and you recognize how the ELOF can help you to be a better teacher.

Will: Thank you Peter. We are going to transition now to talk a little bit about how to support children who may have challenges that make it difficult to persist at tasks or engage in activities

you have provided. Sometimes, even when you provide learning environments that reflect your children's interests, you may still struggle to connect with and support some children in really engaging with materials and activities in your classroom.

Judi: Earlier today I was able to sit and talk with Dr. Neal Horen, from the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness. The last time he was here, he talked about using mindfulness to support young children. Let's listen as he shares some specific strategies for supporting mindfulness in your learning environment. Hi, Neal.

Neal Horen: Hi.

Judi: Welcome back.

Neal: Thanks so much for having me here.

Judi: Thanks for being here.

Neal: Yes.

Judi: You're here to help us think about children and teachers in the classroom, and how we can support their social emotional development. Last time you were here one of the strategies you talked about was using mindfulness as a way for children to approach their learning, and also as a way for teachers to take care of themselves. I was hoping that you could explain a little bit about what mindfulness is and how it can be used in the classroom, and specifically why it's important for very young children to be able to practice mindfulness and what it supports for them in their learning.

Neal: Sure. We're spending a lot of time these days talking about mindfulness strategies both for children and for adults. It really is sort of just a way of being—a way of paying more focused attention. You can talk about mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful eating. Those strategies really are about helping children develop a skill, which is that they can focus a bit more. What we've found is that when we support children as they develop this skill, it helps their executive functioning. That is that part of the brain that really helps us plan ahead, remember, stay focused—all the skills that not only do you need to develop as you get ready to move into kindergarten, but also skills that help you when you're waiting in line at an airport as an adult. And so those skills can be really critical if we're helping children be able to manage transitions and regulate their behavior and their emotions throughout the school day.

Judi: So, practicing mindfulness is a way to support their development of executive functioning?

Neal: Sure. And it supports them just overall. We know that there is research in adults that shows that it actually cuts down on health issues. If we can start very early on with simple ways, and we can talk about that—but simple ways of helping children learn those mindfulness strategies, we're setting them on a really good course.

Judi: What would that look like? If I have three-, four- and even five-year-olds in my classroom, what would a young child be doing that would be practicing mindfulness in the classroom?

Neal: We're not saying let's get a group of three-year-olds to do an hour and a half of yoga, but you could do a few yoga moves. You could do some belly breathing where you have the children as they're getting ready for a nap, if they're laying down, let's put a stuffed animal on their belly and have them see what happens when they breathe in and out and slow their breathing down. When we're eating, when we have our community meal, let's not just do it as let's shovel the food in, but let's actually take time. Let's talk about the texture of the food. Let's talk about the smell of the food, the shape and size and what it tastes like. Those kinds of activities—quick activities—we're not asking for extended periods of time, but incorporating those into your classroom can really be helpful so that all of the children are learning those strategies. They're starting to practice them. And then you can call to those strategies when necessary, like, "It's time to slow down. We're getting a little loud. Let's remember what it's like to belly breathe." And you've practiced that.

Judi: That's really interesting. I think of these strategies that you're mentioning teachers kind of do already. Sometimes I have seen teachers sitting at mealtime calling attention to the variety of foods and the textures and what children enjoy eating and what they don't, especially when children are able to serve themselves and be thoughtful about what they're choosing what they're going to eat. It's interesting that you're calling that mindfulness, whereas teachers might not recognize that that's what they're supporting, even though they're doing that. So, that's really interesting.

Neal: It doesn't have to be some formal, "On Tuesday afternoon from one to 1:15 we do mindful breathing." It can be, "I'm going to be paying more attention to the idea that mindfulness is a strategy that I incorporate into all that I do in my classroom during transition times, when we go outside, when we're having a meal." When teachers do that, it is a much smoother way of helping children learn those skills that they ultimately will display in terms of self-regulation and in terms of executive function.

Judi: This sounds like something that all children are going to benefit from. I wonder if you could help us think a little bit about children in the classroom who are presenting some challenging behaviors for whatever reason. There is executive functioning, which you have mentioned that it supports, but also maybe in relationship to managing your own behaviors and your own emotions. Can you talk a little bit about how mindfulness can support that?

Neal: Sure. Part of being mindful is paying attention to how you're feeling both physically and emotionally. If we are supporting three-, four- or five-year-olds in this, they start to be able to recognize, "When I'm angry, this is how I feel." They're mindful of it. When you know how you feel when you're getting angry, you actually might be able to slow yourself down. You might actually not get quite as angry, and you might be able to access, because of those enhanced regulatory skills, those enhanced executing functioning skills, some of the strategies that we've been working on in our classroom. As you mentioned, I think it's a really important point, most teachers are doing this as just a regular part of their day. They're just not calling it mindfulness. What we want to do is we want to help those children, who may at times demonstrate challenging behaviors, enhance those skills. I don't think that we do is we do mindfulness for only a subgroup of children who have some difficulty. What we do is we do it for all, and those children who are still having difficulty now have a set of strategies that they can call upon. "Let's do some belly breathing. Let's sort of slow down." We talk about using glitter jars and different ways of demonstrating mindfulness. That can be helpful to remind children who are

having difficulty how to slow themselves down.

Judi: So, some visual clues?

Neal: Sure. I mentioned a glitter jar. Oftentimes if we develop almost like a snow globe, that's how we explain mindfulness that all of us have lots of emotions, lots of things going on. For children if we help them understand that when you shake it all up it's a little harder to see through, it's a little harder to stay focused, if you wait a second until all that glitter settles down a bit, it's still there. All those emotions will still be there, except now you're better able to do what you need to do to move through whatever challenge has arisen.

Judi: That's really neat. I like that. Maybe just a couple of strategies. You've already mentioned a few about teachers specifically. If you think about from the time children come into the classroom to the time they leave how teachers can really intentionally imbed this throughout their day.

Neal: From my perspective, one of the things that I see in a very effective classroom are staff who understand that this is not a pull-out activity. This is not we do this at a certain point; it's we do these kinds of things throughout the day. So, from the time the child arrives, being mindful and helping that child be mindful that when you enter into this community—our classroom is a community—when you enter into our community, we great each other. "Hi. How are you doing?" Right? The same way you did to me today. That's what we want to help children do, but it doesn't end there. When we transition into an activity, we're mindful that for some children maybe that transition is difficult or more difficult, and so we put in place ways to help them through those transitions. When we get to mealtime, as we've talked about, another opportunity. When we go out and play, are we mindful of our bodies and space? Are we mindful of which children like to do quieter activities, and we let them be and we don't force them? And which children like more active physical sorts of activities, and we're mindful and help them be aware of their neighbors or their partners in this community.

Judi: Yes. That happens a lot. "Don't kick the ball into the kids who are painting," or those kinds of things.

Neal: Right.

Judi: Well, I think that this is a good way to transition into thinking about supporting the health and wellness of adults who are working with young children. As you mentioned last time, this is a growing area of thought and research and thinking, especially when we consider the level of intensity within the course of a day that teachers experience. Maybe you can help us think about what mindfulness looks like for adults, because I think if you want to be supporting that in your classroom or in your learning environment that you would want to be practicing it yourself. For adults who are working with young children, what would mindfulness look like throughout the course of a day?

Neal: I would imagine that it starts before you even get to work. I would put forth the idea that all the adults have their own glitter going—their own families, their own lives—whatever stressors they're dealing with—so that by the time they get to work it might be time to take a few minutes to center yourself, whether it's meditation, yoga, some breathing—some way of

sort of slowing yourself down. I can hear myself actually talking a little bit more slowly in my self-psychology voice. But for the adults it's before anybody arrives into your classroom, are you ready? And are you slowed down enough that when this starts, and we know that the way that the day starts is, bam, it starts—it's quick. Children are coming. Parents have questions. People are dropping things off. Children are starting to move about the classroom. How do you approach that so that you're in a space where if something goes awry, you can sort of handle it in a smooth way? It doesn't throw you off for the rest of the day. Then having some time during the day—and this is the harder part, and this is where if the program itself is paying attention to this, we're making a space where teachers have two minutes to just breathe. Take a breath. That teachers have a chance to not just grab some food and not have a chance to enjoy a meal. I'm not suggesting that they get a three-hour lunch break, but I am saying that the more effective teachers tend to be the ones who are able to slow themselves down, regulate, use their executive functioning. We know that mindfulness has a lot of positive benefits for adults.

Judi: I like your analogy of the snow globe and thinking about maybe settling the snow globe before you start your day, whatever your stuff is, settling that so that you're able to approach your classroom from a centered place. You mentioned giving teachers breaks. I think this is something that programs probably do anyway intuitively. Popping your head in. "Are you okay? Do you need to take a minute?" But maybe being more intentional about providing those breaks for teachers on a regular basis would be helpful. If you can think a little bit more broadly about programs and even staff working with each other how they can support each other. Many times there are two or more adults in the classroom working together. Are there ways that staff can support each other either within the classrooms or with other staff in the building to make sure that this is something that is a regular practice?

Neal: I think it's a really good question, because it gets at the idea that this is not just a job; this is a place where we're supporting children and their families, and we're supporting one another. If everyone is mindful of that—if everyone is paying attention to that in a way that says, "I'm going to go out of my way to be supportive," so if I'm working in a classroom, you and I are in the classroom together, I'm paying attention to, "I know that that behavior of that child really pushes your button. I'm going to step in either for you or for that child. I'm just going to say, 'Let's redirect a little bit.' I'm going to practice the breathing so that it helps you slow down. The director of the program is going to create a culture so that we are supportive of one another. We see ourselves as a community." I was just out visiting a program where they have a yoga instructor actually come in at the end of the day once a week. Another program was talking about not only encouraging gym membership, but providing a gym membership, and then you have to use it a certain number of times. It's almost pushing people to be mindful about their own health. I think we talked about this last time, if I remember right, that when adults are under stress, they tend to use harsher discipline. They're more punitive. When they're able to slow themselves down, they are experiencing less stress, they tend to be able to demonstrate those skills that we know all of our teachers have. They are caring. They're reflective. They're supportive. When a culture like that exists within a program, we're much more likely to see staff be able to do those kinds of things.

Judi: That's great. Thank you. This has been really helpful.

Neal: Thanks for having me.

Judi: It's given me a lot to think about. I'm going to try to be more mindful in my own practice. And we'll see you again on our next episode.

Neal: I'm super excited.

Judi: Thanks, Neal.

Neal: All right. Thank you.

Judi: It has been wonderful to hear about the many ways we can be more intentional about engaging children in really creative and thoughtful ways. Take some time to consider your learning environment. Think of it as a third teacher that helps you support children's growth and development. Remember, children thrive in a classroom that is designed with them in mind. This means that the materials and learning activities you provide represent children's interests, abilities, cultures, languages, and communities.

Will: We'll look forward to seeing you again on our next episode, which will be on Friday, March 10th. We'll discuss strategies you can use to develop more meaningful relationships with children in ways that support their learning and development. We are going to leave you with some great resources if you'd like to continue learning more about implementing a high-quality, developmentally appropriate curriculum in your classroom. You can find those resources by clicking on the viewer's guide that is on your screen.

Judi: I'd like to thank all of our guests for joining us, and please remember to ask your questions in the chat box. We'll have the chance to address some of those questions at our upcoming Coffee Break. Thank you for being here with us today. Now we're going to leave you with this moment of learning.

[Begin Video Clip]

Student: [inaudible 59:53].

Teacher: To the fisher?

Student: Yes. Do—

Teacher: Are they all done having a shower? Or should we still keep giving them showers?

Student: Oh, not. It's raining now.

Teacher: It's raining?

Student: Yes.

Teacher: Where's my coat? It's raining?

Student: I've got a whole bunch.

Teacher: You've got a whole bunch of—is that—oh.

Student: Yes.

Teacher: Hey, he's using his boat to knock over all the animals. I don't know if the animal's going like that.

[End Video]